

Are Those Gyoza Going Spare?

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Are Those Gyoza Going Spare?

by [AtticusCrete](#)

Summary

After Hannibal returns home from hospital he gradually recalls more about his life. Some things though are a little more elusive. Fortunately that's what friends and frenemies are for. To remind you about the good things. And the other things. And the other, other things.

Featuring a happy Hannigram marriage, a best selling author Hannibal, a college age Abigail, engaged Mischa and Freddie Lounds, and Bedelia Du Maurier the kind of literary agent you definitely want on your side, working for you, and not against. Dear gods, not against!

Hot Noodles AU. Roughly season 2. Though god knows how that's going to pan out! Both Will and Hannibal have had viral encephalitis, Will is mostly recovered, Hannibal has lost some of his memories!

Updating regularly, probably 25 short chapters. Expect fluff. A lot of fluff. Maybe a teeny bit of angst, and the occasional killer, just to offset the fluff.

(Note to self, must check definition of fluff)

Notes

For all those lovely fannibals who just fancy a little fluffiness. Even though this is the best fandom ever (TM) and I love me some angst, I also love me a lot of fluff. No shit Sherlock!

Chapter 1

Once the pleasure of their anniversary party has passed Hannibal and Will settle back into what passes for their new normal life. For Hannibal this continues to be a mix of cheerily familiar and bewilderingly strange.

Sitting down at the harpsichord he carefully lifts the lid and is then faced with a blank space in his mind. He'd left Will finishing off the drying up after supper, and Will finds him like this thirty minutes later still sitting staring at the keyboard. Hannibal turns on the bench and looks at his husband,

'I can't remember anything'

Will walks closer to him and Hannibal puts his arms round Will's waist, Will carefully cradling Hannibal's head against his chest,

'We could ask Abbs to come and play some duets with you, it might trick your brain into remembering?'

Over the course of the last three weeks since Hannibal came home from hospital they've discovered that the best way for him to recover motor skills is for him to engage alongside someone else.

Knife skills returned when Hannibal watched Mischa and Will massacre some vegetables he asked them to julienne, steeping in to save something of the peppers and zucchini. Drawing returned when Abigail and Mischa may have accidentally on purpose made a hash of the lettering on place names and signage for the anniversary party. In the bedroom Will and Hannibal have rediscovered their manual dexterity together. This has been revelatory. A forced absence demonstrating that it is not only the heart that grows fonder!

Hannibal smiles at Will, 'you're right. It'll come back to me. Everything else has so far'

'It will. And really the most important thing has already come back to me, to both of us'

Hannibal smiles 'there's a reason I'm the best selling author and not you isn't there?'

Will makes a shocked face 'wow, are you dissing my dialogue skills? You horror! Honestly! How have I managed twenty minutes let alone twenty years! Gods. I'm so glad you're home'

'As am I'

'Good'

'Last word Will? If you like? I can be generous'

'.....'

Hannibal smirks and makes a dash for the door. Some things he definitely remembers.

Chapter 2

"As Hasdrubal carefully cupped Tom's chin in one hand, he drew them closer together. Tom gazed into his eyes with a mixture of hope and terror. Hasdrubal wondered if he saw the same emotions echoed in the depths of his own soul. 'Tom, you're all I've wanted from the moment we met' as he pulled the shorter man towards him he felt Tom's breath catch and then all there was was a kiss. And oh such a kiss"

Hannibal realises he's eaten all the way through a large bowl of popcorn. He's been absolutely glued to the Hasdrubal series. With classical allusion, extended metaphor, conflicted characters and a strong cast he can see why it's been a smash hit!

He started reading when Will left for Quantico this morning. Initially he settled in his small office, the idea being to reacquaint himself with the whole of his back catalogue before meeting his agent later in the week. After half an hour he relocated to the comfort of the sofa in the living room. He toed off his slippers and put his feet up and didn't shift again until he finished Hasdrubal 1. He made himself a sandwich and re-heated some soup at lunchtime, still reading as he stood at the island in the kitchen.

He finished Hasdrubal 2 in the late afternoon and went to make some popcorn to accompany Hasdrubal 3. Halfway through he realises he's utterly hooked and that the popcorn has all gone. He's about to hide the evidence when he hears the front door go 'hey Hannibal, I'm home'

Hannibal casts around for somewhere to hide the bowl, under a cushion and half behind him, not ideal, it'll have to do.

'Hello Will! In the living room'

Will comes in and bends down and kisses him 'hmm. What have you been eating? Kiss me again so I can work it out'

Hannibal laughs and evades his husband 'how has your day been?'

'Alright thanks. Still one group of malcontents who I think won't pass and who are annoyed with me about their shortcomings. But that's not surprising' Will surveys Hannibal's crumpled, crumbed state. 'You've forgotten we're going out this evening haven't you? Did you not see the texts?'

'Oh. I left my cell in the office'

'Never mind, we have forty minutes to eat, shower, change and get out of here. Abbs' recital. I thought you'd forget. Look at me being the responsible one. Come on I'll make omelettes or something. Tell me about your day'

Hannibal spends the next fifteen minutes excitedly explaining to Will why Hasdrubal is so good. Will smiles. He decides not to let on he's heard some of this before. Several times. He

almost feels like he wrote it sometimes! It's clear Hannibal has become a fannibal, one of the legions of people who send him fan mail of various kinds. Some of it very peculiar.

'I'm glad you've been enjoying yourself, but eat this and then go and get changed! We're not going to be late because you're drooling over yourself!'

Hannibal is about to protest when he recognises the truth in the words. 'It's very important to maintain ones self esteem Will'. 'Yeah right. I can see we're putting your hat size up by another quarter of an inch then' Will grins and this time it's him who makes a sharp exit.

'Rude!' Exclaims Hannibal.

Chapter 3

Hannibal and Will make their way between people thronging the aisles, heading for the temporary bar where they hope there are drinks waiting for them. Hannibal is just slightly overwhelmed by the numbers, unusual for him, he has a hand just touched to the back of Will's elbow 'I hadn't expected so many at a student recital!'

The auditorium of the College is packed with the doting family and friends of the various students playing in the concert this evening. The college specialises in strings and keyboards. Abigail is playing a cello duet with a friend and playing the harpsichord, performing a piece she's composed for the course she is studying.

'Some of the students are exceptional this year. Abbs is in the top five, but she thinks she won't get the performance prize this time around'

Hannibal looks at Will, there are still some things he just doesn't recall, sharp and painful. They find the table with their drinks and Will spends the next fifteen minutes helpfully making sure he greets people by name and connection just in case Hannibal can't remember. Except for one man who slides in, ignores Will, but greets Hannibal. Will remains tightlipped, and says nothing. Hannibal does his maximum best but he's perturbed, this isn't like Will.

When the man has departed he turns questioningly to Will 'what is it? Who was that?'

'His name's Tobias Budge, he used to teach cello to Abigail. It's complicated. Well' he sighs 'I hoped you'd remember this. We had a sticky month last year. I was consulting on the Buffalo Bill case. With Clarice Starling. We spent rather a lot of time together. You thought we were having an affair. We weren't. But, well,'

Hannibal looks at him sombrely 'go on. What happened?'

'Tobias tried it on a bit, with you, you met him for coffee to go over some stuff to do with Abigail's playing. Then you had lunch. Then, I was off in, anyway that doesn't matter. He came for dinner. It turned out you hadn't realised what was going on. Most of it was in his head. But I got back early, and let's just say he'd thought he was having you for dessert'

'Will!'

Will looks slightly embarrassed 'I rather punched him. He hit me back. There was a scrap. You're pretty good in a knock down, so I think we can say you won. So. Anyway. We agreed he wouldn't teach Abigail any more. And I resolutely stay out of his way. He took a bit of chance. He might have heard you'd got some memory gaps.' Will looks annoyed,

Hannibal looks at Will, very upset, 'I simply can't imagine that I would be desirous of anyone but you! Ever'

'Good job too! I don't share! I think it demonstrated that we could both be a bit jealous. We talked more about my consulting work stuff after that. It's actually helped a lot. But I'm not grateful to him. Especially now. He's an unrepentant shit'

'And we're alright? Now I mean. Aren't we?'

'Yes. Better than brilliant'

Hannibal breathes a sigh of relief. He knew there might be difficult as well as happy things to discover but this is troubling. Except that. Well. After twenty years it is rather gratifying to discover that Will would go to the mattresses for him. He feels just a hint of arousal at the thought. Better tamp that down. For later. He smiles sweetly at Will,

Will narrows his eyes 'What?'

Chapter 4

'It was good wasn't it?'

'Baby girl, it was wonderful. And you were wrong!'

Abigail smiles. She did win the performance prize for the cello piece, with her friend, and this year won the composition prize too. 'Pa was pleased wasn't he?'

'Over the moon I'd say. He won't be long. You know what the coat queue is like at these things'

'Is Pa ok?' Abigail looks at her father. Well. One of them. She knows she's incredibly, bountifully, utterly, lucky. She's close to both of them. In slightly different ways and with slightly different shared interests but there is a mutual and reciprocal bond between each of them, and the three of them. If any of them were religious they might say they were blessed.

'Mr Budge took the opportunity to come over and say hello'

At the time Will and Hannibal told Abigail what happened. In part to ask her about whether she wanted to keep him as a teacher, and because at sixteen she knew when something was not right in their contented world.

'Really? God. Dad that's pretty lame of him. What did Pa say? Didn't he remember?'

'Nope. Not a bit'

'Oh. Oh dear. Did you tell him. You did. Of course you did. Oh dad. I'm so sorry'

She puts her arms round him and they stand like that hugging. Abigail pulls back just slightly so she can see his face and asks quietly 'do you think he remembers about Alana?'

'I don't know. He didn't mention it. I'm honestly torn about whether to say anything or not'

'But Bev and Alana both know. She might have told Brian too?'

'She might. I don't know. Their party is coming up. I don't want to spoil that. It was a long time ago'

Abigail hugs her dad harder. She can remember finding him on the floor of the kitchen passed out from whisky. She'd been seven at the time. Hannibal hadn't been at home. She had phoned her Auntie Bev just like she'd been told to phone an adult she liked if ever anything happened, or she was scared, and neither of her fathers were there.

'You could ask Bev? I don't know, maybe she would tell pa? Just, well. It's awful if you keep having to go over bad stuff. It wasn't your fault. Do you know what Alana says about it now?'

'I think she mostly doesn't. I know I still grit my teeth when your pa is at a therapists meeting. Or at a conference overnight. I shouldn't tell you this. I'm sorry Abbs. It's not fair of me.'

He shakes his head. Abigail wonders if he knows how handsome he looks when he looks slightly sad. Like some renaissance saint about to be executed. She hadn't realised it still upset him. He's made a good job of hiding it. Alana come over for drinks and meals and everything. Because really Alana is her Papa's friend. She nibbles at her bottom lip.

'Here we are, coats!' Hannibal joins them with a heap of outdoor wear 'my darling girl, how wonderful you were!'

Abigail hugs her father, how she adores him. But someone else needs to help her and Will deal with some of the tricky stuff he has forgotten.

Chapter 5

Late that night Will has gone to bed, grumbling about early starts and annoying part timers, and don't wake me. Abigail and her other dad stay up, initially it's to talk about her composition. They have these kinds of conversation in the kitchen. The two of them. She loves their closeness. And she's wondering if she should spill the beans.

'Are you helping with the catering for Brian and Alana?'

'I hadn't thought to, why? Have I forgotten?' Hannibal smiles at his daughter, there's something on her mind, but she's finding her way into it.

'No. I don't think so. Do you remember anything to do with Alana?'

'In what sense, my sweet?'

'When she was your student? When I was little?'

Hannibal looks at her assessing 'there's something wrong isn't there? You don't know if I know or not?' She nods looking anxious, Hannibal feels an ache in his chest, maybe they will have to keep dealing with old hurts 'my dearest love, just tell me. I won't promise not to be upset, but I promise not to be angry'

She nods 'alright. Ok. I'll tell you in one go then I won't feel scared about it. Ok. When she was your student you saw a lot of her. She came here, like, all the time. She baby sat for me too. She kind of became an extra bit of the family. Which was sort of nice. But the two of you spent a lot of time together at the university as well. And went to events and conferences and things. Dad was upset but he didn't say really anything, I only know this because I heard him talking to Aunty Bev. Actually he was crying'

she stops, as though she might cry too just from the memory of the misery and fear

'He started to drink a bit too much. You got cross with him for drinking. And you stared to not be sort of present, like you'd take calls and texts when we were doing other family things. Someone at the uni sent dad an anonymous note saying you were having an affair with a student. It was a mess. We thought you were going to leave us. Dad got really bad.

Mr Crawford put him on compassionate leave. He had a bit of a breakdown. But you just thought he was angry and drinking too much. You used to get loud when you got cross and dad just withdrew. Went all quiet. There was a night when I woke up and I came downstairs and dad was passed out. You weren't here'

Hannibal stares at her 'I was staying in a hotel. We had an argument. I thought he was being ridiculous. I remember. Oh god. I remember. You phoned Beverly, she got Will to hospital, she took you home. I remember it all. Oh. How could I forget this?'

Hannibal can remember the sharp horror of Beverly calling from the hospital saying that she'd got Abigail and could he please come to try and salvage what was left of Will. Hannibal had been terrified.

It had taken weeks of conversation and care to retrieve Will from his desperation and overwhelming fear. Beverly had talked to Alana too, asked her to stay away. She'd been defiant at first, and eventually realised that even if she'd thought there was something there, Hannibal had not. He looks at Abigail now,

'I cannot tell you how much I regret that you are both having to go through this again' he holds out a hand to her and she clutches at him 'I was so scared. I thought he was dead. I thought you'd left me'

'Never. My darling. Never'

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Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Alert...Little bit of vanilla Hannigram sex in this chapter.

Later, much later, After Hannibal has tucked Abigail in, never mind that she's seventeen and an adult in many ways, Hannibal goes quietly to bed. In their room he can see Will is asleep, breathing steadily. Hannibal undresses noiselessly and goes into the adjacent bathroom to wash. He returns and decides to forego his usual sleep ware. He won't wake Will, but if he should wake Hannibal wants to have nothing between them.

In the early hours Will wakes long before the alarm goes off. As usual they have migrated in their sleep to be curled round each other. Will is surprised to find Hannibal naked. For a moment he wonders if Abigail and he talked. That something came up in conversation that made Hannibal yearn for closeness. Carefully Will takes off his own shirt and slides down his shorts. And tucks himself back in.

They wake together two hours later. Instantly they search each other out with mouths and hands and the press of their bodies against one another. Quietly but insistently Hannibal works Will open with fingers and lube and continuing kisses that make Will moan. When Hannibal enters him there is no resistance between them and they move steadily, languorously, until something in Hannibal hitches and there is an answering sigh from Will. And then it's fast and hard and intent. Both chasing the goal of the other's orgasm.

When it comes there is sufficient noise from both of them, that in the afterglow they make the kind of faces that say "oops, do you think the kids heard that?" They press themselves together and laugh a little. Giggle even. Enjoying being with each other, confident that even if she has heard that they won't have traumatised their daughter! 'I love you Will. Always'

Down the corridor Abigail has heard them. She smiles to herself. It's not weird to be glad your dads have nice sex. Some of her friends report their parents, or guardians or whatever combination of adults that they have in their lives as having no sex, or that they are embarrassed about sex, or that they hide any evidence of sexual intimacy.

Hannibal and Will have never been like that. They haven't had sex with her present, they're not that, whatever that is? except perhaps when she was a baby in a crib? She doesn't know? But they've always been content for her to understand that they share a slightly different kind of love than they do with her. Not better, just different.

She's glad things are ok. They can both be a bit, well, she thinks of it as "like parents" because that's who they are to her. But she's knows they're a bit different to other couples,

other parents, as a pair, and individually. Her dad's empathy and all round intelligence, her papa's wide range of incredible skills and also, that all round intelligence.

She also knows that after happy parental sex there is likely to be a phenomenal breakfast. Win. She grins to herself. Time to get up then, she can hear her fathers' shower going in the distance.

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Chapter 7

Will stares out of the window of the Quantico lab. The science team are just getting everything together so they can have a case conference. Really they're waiting for Jack. That's not unusual, he's occupied with family worries. They get it.

And really the team needed the good news of Hannibal waking up and Brian getting engaged to have something nice to bitch about rather than only sad things which no one really sasses about.

'How was the recital? I'm sorry I couldn't go'

'It was good thanks' Jimmy and Brian turn to look at Will too 'she won two prizes. Guess we know who she takes after musically'

Bev punches him lightly in the shoulder 'yeah. Not you for sure. You couldn't carry a tune if it was a backpack with a waist belt and only weighed three pounds'

'Hey, I can play the piano and the mouth organ!'

They all groan, Will might be good on the harmonica but it's too portable for their tastes! He rolls his eyes 'you wait until we're in a scene in the middle of the nowhere and no entertainment for miles you'll wish I'd brought it with me then'

The team grins at this. There have been a number of inebriated nights in various seedy motels which involved harmonica karaoke or just Will playing mournful southern blues to cheer them up after a dreadful day.

Recently they've taken to having bad poetry rap alongside Will's accompaniment. It's left them breathless with laughter on occasion. Jimmy in particular is especially good. Will fingers his harmonica in his pocket. Awfully tempting. Though perhaps not over a fresh corpse. Though he'd make it respectful. An elegy of some kind. This had been a person, before.

Before someone changed them into what ever this is. Some new design.

As a team they're lucky. They click. It works well. Which is fortunate because there have been some recent murders which look like the might be a series. They're not quite sure yet. There had been two which looked connected, then quite a few months break, and now there's another body. Jack has gone so far as to bring Will in which he only does for bad serials.

In effect they're holding their breath. Is this a new killer on the block?

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Chapter 8

Hannibal seats himself opposite the tall window in Bedelia's austere and streamlined office. To discover that she is his agent had made a kind of sense in the torturous corridors of his mind palace, now being re-built, remodelled and redeveloped at an increasing rate. His errant memories beginning to cascade over the last few days, Hannibal wonders if it means the log jam was caused by the things he had desperately been trying not to remember. If Bedelia were still a therapist he might ask her for an opinion.

She'd given up her own practice after being assaulted by a former patient. Subsequently she'd translated her assiduous people skills into a very successful literary agency. Hannibal had been one of her first clients and she had helped him establish both of them as leaders in their respective fields.

'I'm pleased to see you Hannibal. How is it back in normal life?'

Hannibal considers 'I would say it is regaining its normalcy. There have been gaps to fill, and some surprising lapses of skill or understanding on my part. But it's coming back to me. Will and Abigail have been wonderful. But it's a challenge, at times'

'Ahh the eternal epistemological conundrum'

'That we cannot know what we do not know, not even sometimes that we do not know it? Indeed'

She smiles, erudition and perspicacity are not attributes in which Hannibal is lacking. Usually. She had heard that his memory was affected. That seems less likely as she listens to him. Though he has always been good at concealing all but the strongest emotions, or anything where Will or Abigail or Mischa are concerned, he is clearly relieved that all is well between the three and four of them

She continues 'I have some ideas about the ways in which we might manage some advance publicity for Hasdrubal VIII if you are amenable?'

'Oh? Something more proactive, in anticipation? The sales for VII seem healthy'

'They are. And I hope we might manage to ride some of that wave too. A little retrospection, a little anticipation? It's one of the ways in which I might sell it to a festival or two, or some television. There's a writer's retreat who'd like you to guest if you're interested? And a poetry jam' she says the word with some distaste, though Hannibal smiles, Will might enjoy that 'yes, a jam, in DC that needs a prize giver. Short speech, some book sales, comments on the winners and the runners up. Of that sort?'

Hannibal nods 'if you work out a schedule, I'd be willing. East coast mainly for preference. Not more than one a week. Perhaps one or two trips Westwards. Maximum of four months. I really must get down to it if there's to be number 8 hardback for the Christmas bonanza' they both smile at that.

Whilst there is a steady stream of sales through ebooks and book stores, hardbacks fly off the shelves and straight into wrapping paper as Christmas and Hanukkah gifts. One year Hasdrubal investigated a complex case to do with some antiquities from the Indian subcontinent and they'd just got the hardback out in time for Diwali. They'd been to a number of parties and events to promote the book. Very enjoyable.

'Good. Thank you. I shall make some enquiries, firm things up, and then let you have an outline? Then we'll get onto publicity around the different events. Alright?

'Yes. Perfectly. Thank you. I know it involves a considerable amount of effort but you manage these complexities so smoothly. I appreciate it very much'

Bedelia smiles. Later Hannibal will remember this moment with great clarity.

Chapter 9

Marissa, Abigail's best friend from high school leans over the bridge looking down. 'I saw your dad on TV last night. He was good. I mean. You know. Kind of. About the books. I think mom fancies him'

Abigail looks at her friend and rolls her eyes 'oh god. Tell her to get in line. And by the way. Gay. Duh.'

'Is he though?'

'God Marissa, just because your parents don't talk about sex and mine do doesn't mean I'm going to trash talk them to you' Abigail throws a stick in the river below and they dash to the other side of the bridge to watch it come through.

'Not what I meant. It's just. Your dads have been together, like for ever. Right?'

'Sure. Twenty years married, three years before that'

'God that's a really long time. I don't know anyone who's been together that long'

'Apart from my dads'

'Yeah. Right. I dunno. I just wondered if they ever, you know, were interested in other people?'

'They've got their own friends, both of them. They don't do everything together. They're not like co-dependent. Well. Not much.'

They both grin, this is a recurring topic between them, just how much should friend's lives entwine? Perhaps it stems from when Abigail went to college and Marissa started working in a store. They stayed friends, good friends, but things changed a bit. They've mostly sorted that out now.

'Are you going to bring Nick home to meet them?'

'I dunno. I like him. But that's a big deal really. Do you think I should?'

'Is he at all intimidated by them do you think?'

'I dunno, d'ya think it's likely what with pa being an international bestselling author and pops being an FBI consultant?'

'Yeah alright. Point'

'I dunno. Maybe I'll have a few friends round, it'd be nice. Keep it low key'

'Uh huh. And neither of your dads will spot that, right?'

'I know. Maybe the best I can do. Maybe after Easter?'

'Sounds good. Will you and Nick..?'

'Well. I don't know. Might do, might not, might be, might not.'

'God, you're like a bloody oyster. So, did you watch your dad?'

'Yeah. We did. We recorded it too. So we can all watch it and throw popcorn at him for real, instead of the screen. Actually it was weird, the popcorn bowl was stuffed behind the cushions on the sofa with some manky kernels at the bottom. I nearly sat on it. Pop wouldn't stop laughing, but that might have been the interviewer dribbling during the introductory segment. Did you see that bit?'

They both laugh.

Chapter 10

Bev and Zeller look with distaste at the bodies laid out on the autopsy tables. Jimmy is trying to remove pollen and diatoms from the crackleurre covering them. The smell is atrocious. The bodies are rotting from the inside out. It's not often that the whole team is grossed out but today is one of those days.

'Where's Will anyway Bev? How come he's missed out on this little box of delights'

'He's gone to some event with Hannibal. Hannibal's presenting some award, maybe getting one too.'

Jimmy looks up 'Tuxedo do?'

'Probably. I didn't actually ask. I mostly feel like it's kinder not to give them a hard time at the moment'

'Yeah. Fair enough. Hannibal is making us an engagement cake. Alana is trying to decide on the colour scheme'

Bev looks at her friend. She has no idea if Alana has ever told him about the backstory with Hannibal and Will, it was before Z moved to the area, long before he met Alana.

'That's nice. Not long now. You've bought the ring right?'

'Oh yeah. All of that's done. Sorted. She won't wear it until the party. But, sorted. Of course. Had to get the size right'

Bev carefully doesn't look at Jimmy. He was there too. He knows.

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'This is nice. Thanks guys'

Will grins at Bev and Jimmy as they settle firmly into the booth of the diner they almost think of as their's.

'Any special reason for this or just, you know?'

Bev grins at him, 'alright clever clogs. Three things, firstly we don't think Brian knows about you know what, does Hannibal? Second, good job on the award, you both looked very pretty. Third, and this is a bit weirder, Jimmy? You're up'

Jimmy takes up the reins 'ok, so we're following up the whole collector business for the human taxidermy. Thanks for the colour palette thing, we're working that angle right now. But that's not what we wanted to talk about'

Will looks at them both, he takes a long swig of coffee 'yeah? What. Oh and yes Hannibal knows, apparently Abbs told him at the weekend. The make up sex was fantastic especially as I didn't know what he was making up for. Good to know about Brian. Thanks. I'll tell Hannibal too. None of are saying anything to Brian, right?'

'None of us. Ok. So Hannibal did that TV thing?' Will nods 'yeah. You seen it?' Both Jimmy and Bev nod too 'someone on the set went missing. Just some runner, gets the coffee, picks up stuff, delivers things. You know?'

Will shrugs 'sure. I guess. What happened to him?'

'No one knew. He just didn't show up. Got reported missing 48 hours later'

Will looks at them both and frowns 'ok. I'm missing something, why is this something you know or I should know?'

'It's just that. Well. And this is weird, but the awards event? The guy turned up there, at the venue, he wasn't found until afterwards'

Will looks at them both 'that's nasty. And yes. Weird. Have you found any overlap?'

Jimmy glances at Bev and then back at Will, smiles nervously 'ok, there were a few people in the crew working both events. Same company doing the background stuff. Otherwise the main overlap is actually Hannibal and one of the other guys who were on the same TV programme. It didn't air the same day but the interviews were done one after another. Frederick Chilton? You know him?'

Will nods, not entirely enjoying where this is going 'yup. And?'

Bev takes over as Jimmy is beginning to lose the plot a bit 'someone from that event has just been reported missing. Not from the same company. You and Hannibal were on a table with Chilton weren't you?'

'Yeah. We were, and seven other people. Shit. Why have you been called in'

'We haven't been, yet. But we wanted to give you a heads up. If someone in the arts community is blowing their load, then, well you're both a little bit high profile, right'

'Great. We could do without some kind of murdering stalker thing. You talked to Fredrick? No? I can if you want'

The others both nod, marvellous thinks Will. Bloody marvellous.

Chapter 11

Abigail ties her father's tie 'you look nice dad, it'll be fine. It's just a party.'

Will smiles at her 'I know. I'm overreacting. You look very pretty. New dress?'

'Maybe' she smirks.

'God, he spoils you'

She nods, 'he spoils both of us'

Hannibal joins his husband and daughter in the bedroom 'who spoils whom? Or is this to do with the dress?'

'I think I look fantastic'

'You do, my darling. We all do. Will do you need Abigail to mangle that some more or shall I assist?'

Will turns himself towards Hannibal and lifts his chin to allow him to tie the stupid bow tie into shape.

'There. It just takes practice'

Abigail mouths something to her dad which might have been something less complimentary about the futility of ties in general and bow ties in particular. Hannibal frowns at her. Will holds up a hand. 'No tie soliloquy, you promised, after last time'

Hannibal doesn't remember, how delicious to haul out 'encephalitis' as an excuse if ever anything occurs that he would rather hadn't or didn't. He ruefully acknowledges that this is easier to pull off now he thinks he has remembered everything.

'Have we got the present?'

'Check'

'and the card, and the cake? Or is that there already?'

Hannibal looks at them, 'what cake?'

Will and Abigail look at each other 'oh my god. Did you not remember? Shit. Encephalitis! You're supposed to be making their engagement cake'

Hannibal smiles 'oh, that cake. Oh yes, I delivered it to Brian yesterday'

'Abigail close your ears a moment. You utter bastard. You nearly gave me a heart attack'

'I would pay good money to see that expression on your face again'

The venue is a forty minute drive and Abigail manages the journey with no concerns. When they arrive they park the car, gather up presents, and themselves, and go in. Abigail is almost immediately pulled off by Beverly to go and do something Will decides he doesn't want to know about.

Hannibal leans over to him 'I understand this might be difficult. Thank you'

Will glances at him 'just as long as she doesn't imply that she settled or that you did, then we'll be fine. If she does? Well. All bets are off. Brian is my friend too'

'Do you suspect her motives?'

'I'm utterly biased and unable to make an objective assessment of their relationship. I hope he, well, they are really happy'

'I hadn't known until Abigail said that it had been ongoingly difficult'

'I didn't mean to tell her. And certainly not you. I'm not proud of it. I think I'm going to get a drink. Can I get you something?'

'No I'm fine. Thank you' he watches as Will heads off towards the bar on the far side, considering, Jimmy Price greets him 'hey, Hannibal, alright? You look a bit pensive'

'Jimmy, how nice, actually, may I ask you something? Possibly something slightly difficult?'

'Sure Hannibal, I'll give it a go, what is it?'

'Have you ever been conscious of Alana needling Will in any way?'

Jimmy looks at him. Does Hannibal knows he knows. Oh well, he did ask,

'Hannibal, you may not know that I know what happened. And frankly? Will has been nicer than anyone I know to Alana, including Brian. But she does like to twist the knife a bit. Not all the time. Just every now and again. It's got better since Brian, but one of the interns noticed it and asked about it in a team meeting. Shall we say that Jack and Alana had words.'

'And Will has always... '

'He has always been kind and friendly and included her and clearly tried to sit light to it. Bev has told her to lay off once or twice when there's been a conference or some thing you're both going to'

'And this has upset Will?'

'Honestly? I think at times it has probably made him utterly miserable. But well, Will has just sucked it up. He loves you, he trusts you. He gets on with it. He has to work with Alana. So. Well. There it is.'

'Jimmy. Thank you. I'm grateful for your honesty. Very'

Will comes back 'hello you two, Jimmy I brought you ginger and something, I'm not sure if the barman understood. Hannibal this is a juice thing, best I could do I'm afraid. I know you said not, but that was ten minutes ago. You might have changed your mind by now'

Hannibal takes the drinks and hands them both to Jimmy and carefully pulls Will into an embrace. With some surprise Will responds. Eventually Hannibal let's go and retrieves his glass from a mildly amused Jimmy. Will looks at him with some concern,

'I am reminded again and again that of the two of us you are by far the better man Will. Thank you. I wonder if you would let me take you away somewhere next weekend?'

Will blinks at him and then glances at Jimmy who smirks into his own glass 'ok. That sounds very nice. I'm not sure what's brought this on. Maybe I should just say encephalitis and smile?'

'Maybe you should'

Chapter 12

'Thank you, that is really mega of you, like I always thought, like authors are a bit, you know, so I'm like, wow. Thanks. Can we do a quick selfie, yay. 'K thanks, bye'

Will smiles at Hannibal as the two tourists wave bye as they leave the restaurant.

'I'm going to buy you some dark glasses and a hat, you're too distinctive'

'They were very polite though, waiting until we finished dinner'

'Yes that's something. True. And this is very nice. Thank you..'

'My love, it is a pleasure to spend time with you with nothing else to think of'

Will beams 'that's nice of you. Now, dessert, or coffee, or both?'

'Both I think, and you?'

Will grins some more 'just coffee, I'll save dessert for later!'

Hannibal's face softens 'Good. I like the house. It's very pleasing. Shall we send Iris some nice thank you'

'Yeah. Let's look around tomorrow. God I feel so lazy. And actually not unwell!'

'A happy change then, for both of us'

'Did I tell you what Bev and Jim said? About the awards evening?'

Hannibal looks surprised, he takes a mouthful of his dessert 'no, what, what happened?'

'Sorry' Will grimaces 'it kind of got lost in everything else. Ok, so, someone in the company that were doing the background stuff on that TV thing you did was abducted, their body turned up at the venue we went to for the awards evening. And someone from that event has gone missing.'

Hannibal pauses, spoon halfway to his mouth 'that's not a coincidence is it? What does Jack say?'

'He's holding back. Two doesn't make a serial, it could be a coincidence. But Bev and Jimmy said we should be careful'

'Indeed, I should say so. Anything else?'

'Not yet. I think there were things they couldn't say. Even if they aren't officially on the case yet.'

Later that evening back in the house their friend Iris Komeda has leant them Will flicks through his tablet whilst Hannibal makes coffee and a small dessert for Will.

'Hannibal! Shit. Come and look at this, Freddie must have an in with the local PD!'

He hands over the tablet, the tab open at tattlecrime.com

"Has Hasdrubal Conquered After All:- victim of Philly abduction found on Martha's Vineyard. Has a Fannibal gone too far? Arthur Green assistant exec at Panther Productions disappeared only ten days ago at an awards ceremony in Philadelphia. The popular author of the Hasdrubal series of upscale Roman Policier Dr Hannibal Lecter received an outstanding contribution award. In a strange twist a copy of Hasdrubal IV was found in the hands of the victim. Could this mean a deranged fan is acting out the more esoteric crimes of the series? Agent in Charge Jack Crawford of the FBI was obstinately quiet on the subject'

Will and Hannibal look at each other 'and it's been such a lovely break'

Chapter 13

Will and Jimmy sprawl on Bev's couch. The three of them eating take out. No one says it but they miss Brian. His acerbic nature fits the team, creating a balance between Will and Jimmy on the soft and fluffy side, and he and Bev on the spiky side. His absence isn't unexpected, but they're still a little sad. There's also another elephant in the room. Will gives it a go

'So, you're probably on it but not allowed to say?'

'Uh huh' Bev's mouth is full of noodle. Hot noodles wait for no one. She takes advantage of this, eyes on Will as she repeatedly stuffs her face full.

Will sighs 'alright. I'm sorry about Freddie. I promise I said nothing to her' Bev and Jimmy nod and make yeah-we-know-mouth-full noises.

Jimmy swallows 'are you going to eat those gyoza or are they going spare?'

Will doesn't feel like being punny. Hannibal is visiting Chiyoh and Murasaki in New York. It gives Will time to slob out and eat take-out with Bev and Jimmy. But they are skating round some tricky issues.

'Jack's not going to get me in, is he? Shit, you must be overworked; what, the collector, the triad, the other pair, and, wait, are they part of this now?'

Bev and Jimmy both reach for the gyoza. Will goggles a bit 'shit, guys! Four, plus a triad, and the collector? Tell me that's it?'

'Jack didn't really want to let us out to eat, not cos it's you, just the volume of stuff there is. I'm sorry the Hasdrubal detail was leaked. From the first two bodies. I think you'll be under some scrutiny'

'Because of ...no, sorry, I know you can't say. I won't ask. Here give me the last gyoza'

They all eat with stuffed mouths preventing further conversation but possibly promoting later indigestion!

Chapter 14

'Will, my darling, hello, yes I'm here, no problems at all.... they send love.....Murasaki wants to stay in three weeks time, for a festival.... good, that's what I said.....yes, it's fine. Cabins, a dining room, a bar and lounge, separate rooms for lectures and sessions, and for teaching and writing. Very nice.... only two slots a day. Frederick is here too. I know....yes..... well..... I'd say everyone is aspiring, one or two published, shorts, novellas..... Yes. Of course..... very sweet actually, Hasdrubal fan fic.....you should take a look. They'll make you smile.... That's right. Oh. I meant to say. Did you see the piece about the Vineyard?..... yes I thought so too.....dreadful. Terrible thing to happen.....we must careful. Shall I call you tomorrow?.... yes I'll call her too..... of course. My dearest love... yes I shall.'

Hannibal finishes the call and she searches out Abigail's number, she answers quickly,

'Hi Pa, oh my god you are so all over social media, like instagram and tumblr? I was going to call dad. Where are you?.... yeah, it's you and some woman in a selfie. The one in the accident near Aunty Iris' house. Did you know about it? That's so weird. no, I asked Freddie..... she had a copy of Hasdrubal V with her. The tourist. I know.....ok. What did dad say.....? Oh.... alright..... I will. I promise. Are you worried..... Alright. Yeah, that makes sense. Ok. Have a nice time there anyway. I love you papa..... Thank you. Big hug.'

Abigail ends the call and wrinkles her nose. Maybe she should ask Mischa what she thinks? Or her dad? She looks at her phone, it's a bit late now? Maybe? Nah, her dad will still be up, mucking round with the dogs if her pa is away

'Dad? Hiya, it's me.....yeah I just talked to him..... what's going on? Really going on, rather than Pa trying not to worry me. He never gets it makes me more worried not less!.....really? Oh. Ok. Tomorrow afternoon?..... I've got a rehearsal..... ok. Yeah. I'll do that. No, I'm in the dorm right now. Ok, yes, I will..... Ok. Don't worry..... I won't be an idiot about it. 3:30 or so? At the practice hall? See you then. I love you dad.....'k bye'

Abigail texts Marissa *omgg, those pix? It is the same grl. I askd Pa! I'm gonna be bk 2mrrw pm, u wanna cm round?*

wow 'k cu 2mrrw. L8r xxx

Chapter 15

In the late afternoon at the writer's retreat Hannibal and Frederick are conducting a joint panel about characterisation and character development. There are lots of questions and ideas are flowing.

Hannibal and Frederick have different styles, they are both bestsellers but with quite different approaches. Hannibal has an ensemble cast with 1-2 leads, whilst Frederick has a lone wolf ex cop Private Investigator. It makes for a lively debate for the attendees at the retreat.

New York State is beautiful at this time of year and the retreat is clearly successful as these events go. When the group break for a brief rest before dinner Hannibal and Frederick sit in the bar together. They talk about various events and activities they've attended recently, or are planning to take part in.

Perhaps not surprisingly Frederick gets on to what the media are calling the 'Hasdrubal Horror', a name Hannibal finds loathsome in the extreme 'it's an odd coincidence, isn't it? I was in Martha's Vineyard too, just before that tourist!'

'Really Frederick? Of course we were, you'll have seen the photograph'

'The one doing the rounds on social media? Yes. I've seen the photoshopped ones too'

Hannibal grits his teeth, they are utterly distasteful. Offensive even. Fiction and fact shouldn't be mashed up this way. Will had been quite indignant about it. And really he should know. Hannibal resists commenting. He also knows that if Frederick scents prey he can be relentless.

The evening session passes uneventfully and Hannibal is offered endless rounds of drinks in the bar afterwards. The recent brush with encephalitis means he sticks firmly to soft drinks. Something he's glad of later.

He and Will talk late that night. And there's an entertaining interlude of what he imagines might be called phone sex. What ever it's called it's deeply satisfying for both of them. Even the oddness of the mattress in his cabin can't prevent a full night's sleep, assisted no doubt by the extended orgasm he experienced. He has found, in twenty years, that there is nothing more arousing than his husband's own arousal.

Just after 7:00am the next morning there is a sharp rap on his cabin door 'hello?' It's one of the Retreat staff,

'Dr Lecter, I'm so sorry. Could you possibly come to the dining room? We're gathering everyone together. One of the guests didn't join his room-mate last night. We haven't been able to locate him. The local police have asked us to gather everyone together'

Hannibal ducks back into the room and collects a jacket. In the dining room Hannibal is not altogether surprised to find Jack Crawford already in situ.

'Jack, hello'

'Hello Hannibal. Well this is a rum do, isn't it? I'm sorry you've been dragged into this, in some way, one way or another'

Hannibal looks at his and Will's friend. He feels distinctly uncomfortable. They both do.

Chapter 16

'He had a copy of Hasdrubal VI in his bedroom, well actually he had I to VII and VI was missing. Jack thinks the perpetrator took it with him or her'

Will sighs, he seems to be doing a lot of sighing at the moment. Encephalitis might have been better than this. 'It's so nasty. I mean what's it for? It's not an obvious motive? If it was a one-off to get your attention? But six people, re-enacting the crimes? That's a lot of attention they want'

'I know. Fredrick made an unpleasant joke about the publicity being good for sales'

'He would! I've seen a couple of the interviews he's done. I don't think Freddie likes him very much. I'm not entirely sure he realises he's firmly put himself at each of the relevant events and venues!'

'Well, there have been occasions when we have wondered about his acuity'

Will and Hannibal grin at each other. Hannibal pays attention to the eggs he is currently cooking. They try hard to ensure that breakfasts at weekends are leisurely affairs.

'I feel like we're waiting for the other shoe to drop'

'Yes. As do I. It's an uncomfortable sensation. I'm reluctant to articulate it, but it has given me some additional insight for the next book'

Will smiles 'yeah? Well let's not say that aloud outside this room. Is that the door? I'll get it. Are you decent?'

Will checks out the state of Hannibal's attire, he glances down at his own 'good enough, I think. Maybe tie the robe?' Hannibal smiles as Will leaves the room and re-ties the robe around himself.

Will returns from the front door with Special Agents Paul Krendler and Clarice Starling. He pulls a face at Hannibal as he leads them into the kitchen, and then comes around the kitchen island to join Hannibal presenting a united front as they stand together beside one another, across from Clarice and Paul.

'May I offer you some coffee or is this too formal to allow for that?'

'Thanks Hannibal. That sounds very nice. This is informal right now. I'm sorry to disturb your breakfast'

Ninety minutes later the two agents depart, Will looks sadly at said breakfast now congealing on the stove 'I think I've gone off eggs'

'I think we should possibly talk to Alex'

'Oh god. You're right. We should. But you know this is barely circumstantial, don't you. They're reaching. Shit. I mean, Alex is fine but getting the lawyers in already? If we are, then Frederick should too. I'll tell him'

'Do you think that's wise?'

'What? Hey. But surely. You don't think?'

'I hardly know. I think perhaps we should speak with Alex first. One of us must also speak with Abigail. And then, well I wonder if we might pull a leaf out of Hasdrubal's book? So to speak. I appreciate that Bev and Jimmy may not be able to assist, though, if what Paul said is correct they may be pulled off the case? But perhaps some amateur sleuthing of our own?'

'Alright Sherlock, I'll ask Bev, will you phone Mischa and Chiyoh? We could ask Alana too, if you like? I'll call Freddie as well, she might want in or not, do you have an opinion?'

'No. Let her integrity guide her'

Will bursts out laughing 'ok, I'll tell her you said that'

'Do. I think I might call Bedelia. I'm quite keen she doesn't try to capitalise on this publicity. I think that would be in poor taste. I think too Will, that we will manage without Alana'

Will says nothing, but smiles. Quite a few bits of the Hasdrubal series are what he thinks of as not very tasty, at least where norms and mores are concerned. He retrieves his cell from the kitchen sideboard and calls their daughter.

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

This chapter contains references to some of the main cases from season 1 and the start of season 2, with some moderate and very brief description of the murders.

Will swings his legs back and forwards. From his position on a bench in the science lab he has an excellent view of the latest case. It is an impressive sight.

'Jack says that you think you've got another guy, doing, well, what are we calling him?'

'Tree man, or Mr Tree, whichever sticks'

'Ok. That seems reasonable'

Jimmy and Bev circle Mr Tree. The work involved in extracting him from the scene and getting him to the lab had been considerable. He's a local councilman Sheldon Islay. And he's been grafted into a cherry tree. Just now coming into bloom. It has the look of a classical legend, Daphnis and Chloe. His chest and abdominal cavities have been emptied and refilled with beautiful and invariably poisonous flowers.

The team have only just cleared up the collector. He created a mural of bodies, like an eye gazing up to the heavens through the roof of a grain silo. Looking on god and waiting. One of the victims had torn himself out of the design and run for it, only to be pursued off a cliff and into a river below. It might have gone well for him had he not hit his head on a protruding rock on the way down. The Feds had followed the river upstream from where he was found until the pollen and diatoms matched those Jimmy had patiently extracted.

What was strange was that the killer had been sewn into his own mural. He'd either had an accomplice and the relationship had gone bad, or someone unconnected to his crime had killed him. It means there are two people involved.

With Mr Tree it could well have taken two people to move him, and it certainly took time. The grafting of veins and arteries took a lot of time. It has a kind of horrific beauty about it. Will isn't sure which of those two responses are winning.

As he considers he watches Jimmy and Bev. He's made a huge effort and not asked about Hasdrubal VI and if the missing retreat attendee has been found. He knows they must be hoping that as there are only seven books there will be only seven cases. And they're desperate to get him. If he gets to seven and stops, well they all know it is much harder to catch someone not in their killing cycle.

So they've got those six, plus this recent triad and a few unsolved from the previous year. They must be under a lot of pressure.

Will looks again, not simply looking but seeing 'are you thinking that the guy who killed the muralist is the guy on this? And those other from last year? The angel maker and the human totem pole?'

Bev looks at him and frowns 'what do you mean?'

'I'm just thinking about your main cases from last year?'

Jimmy nods 'ok, we had the two stag girls and the two Hospital deaths, they're unsolved. Then there was the cello guy, and the angel maker, we got him, totem pole, the organ harvester, also solved and now the muralist and tree man.'

Bev interjects 'except that we know someone strung up angel maker, and the totem guy had help, we didn't get the help, and now we've got someone sewn into their work'

'Damn!' Says Jimmy, 'those three might be connected! But how would it link to Mr Tree'

Slowly Will says 'how about if all of them are killed by the thing they're killing? Angel Maker died like an angel, the muralist dies as part of his mural, Mr Tree died as a tree, didn't he sign the ok for that wilderness development scheme? And for all we know Totem pole guy should have been in the damn thing. We just got to him too quickly!'

'We should talk to him, Lawrence Wells.' They all nod.

Bev looks at Will 'but that means the Cello Maker isn't part of this series?'

'That's right'

Chapter 18

Brian pushes through the lab doors carrying four coffees in a cardboard tray. He's feeling sad that he's been so busy recently, stuff for the engagement party, Alana's family, his family, the whole shebang. He's not hung out for weeks, and he's missed the lab gang. So, like the smart man he is, he's bringing coffee and muffins. As an offering. He sets down the coffees on the side bench

'Hey, what's up, coffee and muffins and by the looks of it just in time for the show'

'Good job your brought muffins, or there'd be words' Will grins at him 'alright then let's grab our noms and take a look at this'

He's drawn three groups in three circles on the white board, one set has the two pairs in it, one set has the Hasdrubal Horrors I - V with number VI? Just outside it. And the final circle has the three helper cases - angel maker, muralist, totem pole with Mr Tree again just outside it.

Brian puts his head to one side 'ok, I'll buy the sets, though we got Wells, tell me about Mr Tree'

Will explains the idea that they've all died as part of the thing that they're killing, and that they got to Wells before his helper killed him.

Brian nods 'alright. So that's sort of helpful in a depressing way. It means we've got two or possibly three horrendous cases to work. And anyway you missed one, we didn't get the cello maker.'

'Yes. And that's the case I think we should focus on because either it's in with the helper - everyone agrees that Mr Wilson was an appalling instrumentalist so maybe he was deemed to be killing the music or he's actually part of the Hasdrubal set?'

'But we've found books 1 - 5?'

'Yes. But what if the guy killed Mr Wilson just based on the latest book, number VII, and no one got it, so then he started being more explicit and started from the beginning of the series?'

'Ok. But all the other cases involved staging the bodies like something in the book. Is the cello man like anything from Hasdrubal VII?'

Will grinned at him 'and this is the moment when we all admit we haven't read number VII!'

'Sorry Will, I'm waiting for it to be on kindle or in paperback'

'No, no, don't apologise to me! God. If we were nicer you'd get it for Christmas as a matter of course' he laughs 'oh the looks on your faces, don't worry. No chance. I wouldn't let him.'

Alright I'll go home see if I can scare up some copies and we can do some research, I'll be back in a bit'

Will takes the last of his coffee with him, the doors swinging closed after him,

'Do you think Will would mind if I did get the new one for Christmas this year?'

'Jimmy, that's excellent, I was wondering the same thing. I'd want it signed though!'

'Me too'

Chapter 19

Mischa and Freddie are both reading Hasdrubal VII, it feels as though everyone they know is reading Hasdrubal VII. Both Bedelia and Frederick have proved right. It is good for publicity and sales. Mischa is curled up on their sofa with one of their three Siamese cats stretched across her lap. Freddie is sitting across an armchair, opposite her, another cat in her lap. The third cat is off doing something terrible. Probably. He is the serial killer of this family.

When Mischa went into a cafe earlier in the day someone had asked if she was Hannibal Lecter's sister. She'd been taken aback until the fellow customer pointed to the author photo on the back of the hardback, in it Hannibal had a very striking resemblance to Mischa. She'd smiled faintly and agreed. And the man had asked for her autograph right under her brother's. A bit weird.

'Freddie, are you going to write anything about this?'

'Hmm? What? Oh maybe. If the next body drops yeah. I'm not convinced about this though. It's a bit thin, I know there's a musical theme to VII but no cellos deaths. Though. I wonder if Will has thought of..... hang on I'm going to call Will'

She deposits the cat on the sofa and picks up her bag over on the desk by the window. She rifles through it.

'Will? Freddie. Look it just occurred to me, and it probably has you that if this cello killer is a part of this whole thing then it's possible that the body of number six will turn up at the symphony? Oh, I see. Oh that is interesting. Really? Ok. Thanks. I'll sit on it for now'

She switches off the cell and comes back and sits down again, the cat relocates from the sofa to her lap, kneading as she does, claws extended 'ow. Bitch cat! Stop it'

'So?'

'I said I'd sit on it'

'FREDDIE!'

Chapter 20

Tobias Budge reviews the latest article on tattlecrime.com. Of course he knows Freddie Lounds is practically Hannibal Lecter's sister in law, so he's anticipating some bias in the coverage. Still it seems reasonably objective, as long as one knows the relationship.

How interesting to have identified that three serial killers are operating on the Eastern seaboard. One in pairs, one with a strange agenda to rid society of those who might otherwise be the death of it, interesting the case they've strung together. And finally the Hasdrubal Horror. He smiles. That is a particularly unmusical name for such a range of crimes. He reaches under the til in his atelier, he prefers to think of it as a place of craft rather than purely commerce. Ah yes, here's his copy of Hasdrubal VII, what was that chapter about?

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Bedelia Du Maurier reads the email from her number one selling author. Oh for goodness sake Hannibal, get a grip. Yes yes these deaths are all very awful. Oh dear, what a shame. But look at the sales, look at the column inches, look at the exponential growth rate. And look at the bidding war for Hasdrubal IX! It's better than she could even have imagined. Especially with the nice connection to Hannibal's extended stay in hospital. What cunning, what, strategy, what a golden ticket.

.....

Frederick Chilton smooths down his tie, he smiles graciously at the host and stands to give his after lunch speech. He does a number of these events, talking about his lone saviour PI, talking about his own life and work, talking about how wonderful it is to write and wouldn't you all like to be a famous author, or go on a date with one?

At the end of his twelve minutes, ten is too short and fifteen might lead to yawning or nodding heads in the audience, full as they are of a nice lunch and two glasses of wine, he asks if there any questions. The first couple are clearly plants to get the others going, but that's alright, it helps, people are shy, even after two glasses. He points to a woman in a lovely mauve and green dress, she smiles nervously

'Dr Chilton, I just love detective fiction, tell me what you think about the Hasdrubal murders? Does this mean truth is really stranger than fiction?

Frederick smiles, internally he sighs. All he seems to be doing at the moment is talking about Hasdrubal and Hannibal. It'd be better if one of them was bumped off!

.....

In the BSHCI Lawrence Wells is talking to his lawyer. The FEDs are looking for a deal. They want to know just who it was who helped him out with his legacy project. He snorts to himself and sneers to the long suffering court appointed attorney 'as if anyone would believe me if I told them'

Chapter 21

'Alright then, team Hasdrubal, thank you all for coming. We'll eat in about an hour, that's kind of the incentive, plus Jimmy has pointed out that being on the receiving end of future Hasdrubal hardbacks might be nice too! So consider your selves thoroughly bribed. Hannibal, sweetheart, anything to add?'

Hannibal smiles at Will fondly, whilst everyone else is sprawled around their living room. Will has an easel with a big board on it and lots of coloured pens. Whatever it is that might be going on Will is taking the possible threat to his family very seriously.

'Thank you Will. I believe Will has furnished you all with a synopsis of Hasdrubal VII? Good' the various members of the team all wave sheets of paper in the air 'thank you to Melissa for preparing that. What we're primarily concerned with are Jimmy's favourite, the MMO. We're also going to look at the evidence. Clarice thank you for coming, we realise this is all a little unorthodox'

'Well. Given that most of the people in this room know way too much about this case for one reason or another it seems we might as well make the most of that, rather than shut out some useful analysis' Clarice doesn't look at Freddie or Will or even Hannibal but she gets the point across. They've got useful stuff to throw in for sure. And frankly she and Paul Krendler have got nowhere fast.

'Indeed, back to Will'

'Alright folks, we're going to start with motive - what could possibly be the point of these kills?'

There's a gradual chorus of ideas and Will jots them all down on the board. Bev, Jimmy and Brian are a little pre-occupied with the new case they're on, someone turned a guy into a human beehive. None of them could face the honey, but it was an amazing sight. The body glowed in the afternoon sunlight. Will might be the insect expert but Jimmy loves him some bees.

On the board Will has grouped the motives into direct and indirect groups. Direct are the things the killer gains from the murder itself, indirect are the thing gained as a consequence of the kills.

The group look at the two lists; direct - thrill, embodiment of an idea, need, sense of purpose, fulfilment, pleasure, wish satisfying, completion, emotional compulsion, artistic expression, personal satisfaction, desire to communicate, transference of loathing, exhibitionism, exasperation, frustration. The list goes on for a while most of the latter words added all being emotions of some kind.

'Ok, that's a good, and depressing list what about indirect?' As the words are called out Will writes them down quickly

Attention, interest, praise, recognition, punishment, fear, anger, publicity for something - a cause, an idea, a person, a thing, - sales, visibility, money, notoriety, legacy, sensationalism,

As the ideas dry up Hannibal goes to the kitchen to bring back some snacks and drinks. The group look at the two lists, thinking. Abigail puts up her hand, Will smiles, 'go ahead honey, what is it'

'I understand why it's grouped like this and it's not personal, but can we add something else, well, two somethings that bring in the personal side of this?'

'Sure. What?'

'Well, the first is that the timeline is weird, the deaths stopping when you and Pa we're ill, so who would benefit if either of you were accused? And the second is also personal, who benefits, not if it's either of you, but just more generally?'

The science team, Freddie, Clarice, Will, Mischa all look at her, she is very much her fathers' daughter

As Hannibal sets down a tray on the long low table, he smiles 'those are excellent questions'

Chapter 22

'Dr Lecter we are so grateful that you've come. Libraries are under such threat these days. We're almost desperate. Thank you so much.'

Hannibal smiles at the head of the library staff. As a child his local library had furnished him with the means to grow. He's in favour, even if libraries today are unrecognisable from his youthful experiences in communist Eastern Europe.

'Ideally, I hope your agent told you this? We'd like you to announce the winners, reverse order please, say a few words, and then unveil the statue. Is that alright?'

The sweet woman is very anxious. Possibly this is more people than she's seen in her library for months. What with the publicity for the Hasdrubal Horror, the presence of Hannibal Lecter himself for the unveiling, and Frederick Chilton, here to run the afternoon master class, it's packed.

Hannibal lets himself be manoeuvred round the room meeting people and smiling. Will and Frederick Chilton sit off to one side

'He is good at this' Frederick smiles lopsidedly

'He is. Though your sales last year were phenomenal Frederick'

'Yes. I think I hit the popular mood'

'You did. I enjoyed it very much'

'Really? I had no idea you read my work'

'Sure, we've got the whole lot. They're my not very secret vice, late at night with a glass of whisky. Abbs bought me the most recent one for my birthday.'

'I'm touched Will. I might have thought loyalty would prevent you'

'Nah. We're not like that. Respect where it's due.'

Frederick nods, surprised and perhaps a little embarrassed by some of his behaviours recently 'does, well, does Hannibal read them ever?'

Will grins at his diffident tone 'wouldn't you rather that remain a mystery? You like a good mystery?'

Frederick actually smiles 'fair enough. One admission today is satisfying enough for me. He's up, let's listen'

The pair of them pay attention as Hannibal does an excellent job of nice words about libraries, and this one in particular, he praises the poets and is charming to each winner. And

then he gets ready to unveil the donated statue. He pulls the cord and the sheet covering it snags slightly. The head of staff quickly moves to free the cloth. When she's done so Hannibal pulls again.

'Oh shit' exclaims Will 'fucking hell, we should have seen that coming'

Hasdrubal VI is the centrepiece of the tableau, sitting at the feet of the storyteller depicted by the statue, looking up rapturously to receive the words tumbling from the mouth of the bard.

'I better call the bureau. Oh for fucks sake'

Chapter 23

'I'm just saying, what if it's two killers with common cause or one killer with two causes?'

'Z. That makes no kind of sense. What are you talking about?'

'Brian's right Jack, sort of, this kill can be tied into both cases - it fits the Hasdrubal VI story, and it fits the helper's purpose. This guy was certainly killing words, have you read any of his stuff, and we know he's been doing some nasty things'

'I know. I read Bev's analysis. Anything to add Beverly?'

'Only that if we look at his computer files we know he was shady. I needed a brain shower after that lot'

'So, one killer, two modes, gradually synchronising, or two killers, splitting up and then coming back together. Or what. Enlighten me? Will?'

The team spend almost an hour thrashing out the issues. They agree in the end there are two killers though they're split over whether they agreed to work together or not, or whether one of them has effectively taken over both 'storylines'.

Jimmy is nearly thumped when he asks if Hasdrubal VI might have been the Hasdrubal Horror and the helper has helped him tie up his own crime series. Everyone groans. That would mean they've missed The Hasdrubal Horror, and no one likes that idea.

Then there's a moment of, oh, is that how this works? But Will points out that HVI has turned up in the library, which is where the cello maker victim was last seen before his disappearance. His copy of Hasdrubal VII from this very library. Why would Hasdrubal VI be the killer?

Jimmy hangs on to his theory 'but that would make perfect sense! The library leads to the symphony, the symphony to the gallery, the gallery to the TV, the TV to the awards, the awards, to the tourist, the tourist to the writer's retreat, the retreat to the library!'

Will looks at him 'Ok. I see what you're saying. Well. Ok. Yeah. That's good. It does tie up. Buy why did he do it? And I'm still wondering if they knew each other before it ended up like this?'

Jack's exhausted. What with all the things to do with Bella, with this obnoxious bee case hanging over them, plus the jokers from last year and now this theory. His cell goes, the team goes quiet while he nods seriously

'So, clearly we're not done with fuckwittery today. Someone just found a woman sewn into a horse'

A horse? What the very merry actual fuck?

Chapter 24

'Peter? Is that your social worker sewn into the horse?'

'Really? Is that what you said?'

'My very words'

'Unbelievable. And pretty cool' Abigail grins at her dad. Will is knackered, he hasn't seen his home let alone bed for nearly 60 hours. He's also incredibly hungry. He and the rest of the team having been living off coffee fumes and the sugar left in the bottom of a box of doughnuts for the last 24 hours.

Hannibal rubs Will's shoulders 'that's nice, really, s'nice. I'm so tired. I was about to say I could also eat a horse, but you know, probably not'

'I'll make you something dad, grilled cheese and pickles'

Will yawns mightily 'please Abbs. Hannibal don't stop that. That's great'

'So, what's the current thinking? What did Clarice say?'

'She got the records from Bedelia, apparently our guy Hasdrubal VI wrote to her last year saying you'd pinched the story for HVII from him. He claimed he'd had some conversation with you at a writer's retreat three years ago. Wrote an exercise, you gave feedback, he asked you about it, that kind of thing'

'That sounds entirely plausible. What did Bedelia reply to him?'

'She said she'd look into it, asked him for the original exercise, he sent a notarised copy. Which she did look at, there's a follow up letter'

'Go on'

'She copied in your publisher, apparently they decided that having an OC with an identical name and a location for one of the crimes in common didn't count as plagiarism. Oh and you'd also got a variation on the guy's name for one of the characters that gets killed. That's a bit unfortunate'

Hannibal grimaces. It is. 'Why didn't Bedelia say anything?'

'Didn't occur to her apparently. Though I have asked myself if it was in her own interests not to. She's pretty canny about sales and the like' he yawns again, it's a close run thing over whether sleep or the sandwich will win.

'And this poor man at the stables. Is it assumed that he's the Helper?'

'What? Because his social worker is a sick bastard? And he wanted to get rid of Ingram where he got rid of his kills? No, we don't think so. It fits the narrative of the Helper. But no. We really don't think so. I don't think Peter was actually trying to kill Ingram, just make a point, the only way he thought anyone would listen to him'

'So, that means the Helper is still at large?'

'It does, hey thanks Abbs that looks great' he's silenced by mouthfuls of sandwich.

'And those kills are not in any way being connected to either those deaths in the hospital or those two poor girls last year?'

'What, the Copycat kills?' Will swallows his mouthful 'No. not yet. Why? Do you see some kind of connection?' He yawns mightily again 'we thought they might be connected to the Chesapeake Ripper, so we'd get the Shrike, you know, a positive as opposed to a negative. Oh. Oh my god. We got the Shrike because of those two. That's kind of 'helping' oh fuck'

Hannibal looks at him 'So the Helper might be the Chesapeake Ripper?'

'Oh fuck. Jack's going to kill me'

Chapter 25

Pretty well everyone who's ever been involved in the Ripper case is seated round the large tables in the conference room. There's coffee and water. The biscuits and cookies ran out two hours ago.

Jack has been made the lead on this case. The higher ups have agreed, the Helper has now been connected into the Ripper cases. It's just the latest variant of a sophisticated serial killer's modus operandi. He's a sensitive psychopath. Actually they don't really have a name for whatever it is he is. He's certainly very prolific and nigh on impossible to catch.

The Helper persona might be the only thing that gives them a chance. If other serial killers come to light they might just might get the Helper/Ripper in his pursuit of them. Everyone likes the idea of killing two birds with one stone.

There's been a lot of debate about the two hospital deaths. Was Georgia Madchen killed by the Helper or the Ripper? Even if it's the same person, there could be two different expressions of his killing personality.

Donald Sutcliffe was a doctor at the hospital and he had been involved in various malpractice suits, so it could be argued that this is a Helper murder.

Either way, whichever way you look at it, and isn't this the killer for Jack Crawford? The Chesapeake Ripper is active again. Very. Will they get him this time? The Eastern Seaboard of the US seems to be murder central right now.

'Alright folks, this is what we're going to do...'

Epilogue

'Will you promise to be a blessing unto her for all the days of your lives?'

'I will' Brian laughs 'really! I will'

There's some applause and laughter. The Rabbi smiles and claps him on the back, there's more cheering.

Jimmy hands Brian the traditional glass which he flings down on the floor of the synagogue. As he and then Alana stamp on it there are shouts of 'mazel tov' around the congregation.

Jack leans over to Bella 'good memories?'

She smiles at him 'some of the best. Truly lovely'

Further back in the synagogue Hannibal takes Will's hand and kisses it 'the next wedding we go to will be Freddie and Mischa'

Will smiles at Hannibal 'it will. It will never compare though. None of them even come close'

'To have and to hold Will?'

'Yes. For richer or poorer. Doesn't matter to me. And in sickness and in health, that's really meant something this year!'

'For better or worse?'

'Probably had some of that too?'

'From this day forth?'

'Always Hannibal, always'

'My love'

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